DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 875 CG 023 246

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TITLE Developing Employee Assistance Programs: New Roles for School Psychologists.
PUB DATE 21 Apr 90
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists (22nd, San Francisco, CA, April 17-22, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Employee Assistance Programs; Personal Narratives; *Program Development; *School Psychologists; Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1988 an independent school district in Texas formed a 30-member strategic planning team which gathered data on factors impacting the school district at that time and into the foreseeable future. Planning was facilitated by the appointment of 15 action teams formed to write specific plans to fulfill various targets and strategies. This paper discusses the role of the school psychologist in the implementation of one action team's plan to foster positive mental attitudes and self-esteem among students, and specifically, to assist in the development of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The steering committee reviewed the literature on EAP's, met with EAP counselors, and asked five area providers to present their proposal for services. Through involvement in the district-wide strategic planning process, a school psychologist was able to step out of a traditional role and work in a diverse organizational climate/structure. Duties included being an advocate for employee benefits and well-being, a process facilitator of communication and planning, an "expert" in terms of knowledge of community referral resources/agencies, and an organizational change consultant in developing a system-wide program. Program support, a program plan, a policy statement, an information assessment and referral service, appropriate staffing, a confidential record-keeping system, a community referral network, appropriate location of the EAP, funding, resolution of legal questions, training of personnel, program evaluation, and employee education and outreach are listed as essential ingredients of an EAP. (BHK)

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ED329875

Developing Employee Assistance Programs: New Roles for School Psychologists

A Paper Presented to the
National Association of School Psychologists
Annual Meeting

San Francisco, California
April 21, 1990

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Developing Employee Assistance Programs:
New Roles for School Psychologists

In the spring of 1988, the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District formed a 30 member Strategic Planning Team which gathered data related to internal and external factors (economic, political, social, technological) impacting the school district at that time and in the predictable future. The planning team was a representative group made up of two Board of Education members, five parent and business community representatives, six teachers, four principals, ten central administrators and the superintendent. This team developed the beliefs, mission, targets, parameters, and strategies for implementation of a five year plan in a three day planning session in April, 1988.

Strategic planning was facilitated by the appointment of 15 community action teams formed to write specific plans to fulfill the targets and strategies. Over 200 teachers, parents, community members, and administrators served on 15 action teams producing 82 action plans. These 82 plans were reviewed and analyzed by the Strategic Planning Team. The Team selected 60 plans that supported the beliefs, missions, and parameters. The proposed plan was reviewed by the Board of Education during the Winter Retreat in January, 1989, and approved by the Board on March 14, 1989. This paper discusses the role of the school psychologist in the participation and implementation of one action team's plan, i.e., fostering positive mental attitudes and self-esteem among all students, and specifically, the development of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

I was nominated to co-chair, along with a junior high school principal, the action team charged with developing strategic plans for fostering positive mental attitudes and self-esteem among all students. Other committees developed plans in such areas as securing adequate funding, maintaining a quality staff, adult education, volunteer programs, learning styles, communication skills, and planned integration of technology.

Our committee consisted of 16 members including the directors of elementary and secondary counseling, several teachers, and several parents of school district children. As co-chair my responsibility was to facilitate group discussion which would result in the production of action plans which would foster the development of positive attitudes and self-esteem among the districts 17,000 students. The committee also was responsible for identifying people responsible for implementing the plans, and to priortize

was to, along with my co-chair, present and defend our team's strategic plans to the 30 member District Strategic Planning Committee headed by the Superintendent.

The committee developed several plans for developing and maintaining positive mental attitudes and self-esteem for elementary, junior and senior high schools as well as an intervention program for high risk primary aged students. As we defined and developed we explored the idea that positive mental attitudes and self-esteem could not be expected to be developed and fostered among students without first developing these same attributes among the staff. The increasing incidence of mental and emotional difficulties (divorce, substance abuse, single parenthood, stress, depression) was not limited to students but also affected teachers and staff as well. As a school psychologist with the traditional roles of assessment and consulting I was well aware of numerous staff members experiencing significant problems in their lives. As with students, some staff were coping better than others. Dysfunctional work behaviors such as poor attendance, lowered effectiveness, and impaired collegial and supervisory relationships had been observed. As a psychologist I was often asked by teachers, administrators and staff members for information, advice, or assistance in dealing with these behaviors. Our committee felt strongly that in order to begin helping the staff deal with such problems we needed to develop an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as part of our Strategic plan.

Simultaneously, the action team responsible for "maintaining a quality, student-oriented staff" had also developed an EAP strategy. When the district's Strategic Planning Team reviewed the proposals, the EAP concept was adopted as a priority item. The psychologists (we now have 3) were assigned to the EAP steering committee to develop the type of program, policies and procedures, and implementation strategies. Other steering committee members included the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel (chair), Directors of elementary and secondary counseling, Director of Special Education, and the Coordinator of the Student Assistance Program. Later, as we developed the program an elementary and a secondary principal were added to the Steering Committee. We met weekly during March, April, and May.

As a member of the Steering Committee the psychologist's role became one of information gathering and research. Having a doctorate in organizational behavior coupled with professional experience and community awareness enabled me to provide the committee with an

overview of EAP's, their history, purpose, and design. The Steering Committee reviewed the literature on EAP's, met with area EAP counselors, and asked five area providers to present their proposal for services to us. Proposed programs ranged in cost from free (a local private psychiatric facility) to $59,000 per year depending on types and levels of services, and number of employees. It became quite apparent that choosing a vendor was a difficult and complicated process. We had top management and school board support but we still had to clearly define our objectives and explore funding issues. It was clear to us that we wished to tailor our EAP to meet the needs of our organization, its structure, and climate(Chiabotta, 1985).

As a result we developed what we felt to be the best combination of all the programs. The strategic plan budgeted $9,000 for materials and supplies. We negotiated with three private psychiatric facilities in our immediate area to grant $15,000 each in "seed money" to hire our own "in-house" coordinator/counselor. Our Student Assistance Program Counselor secured a $51,000 grant from the Texas Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse for office, utility, and business expenses. The Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and the Directors of counseling hired our in-house EAP counselor, a school district counselor with over 20 years experience in the district, and our EAP was begun. Each hospital administrator was added to the Steering Committee and were recognized with a certificate of appreciation at a school board meeting.

Our next task became one of defining procedures and policies for use of the EAP. Careful attention was given to supervisory referrals and issues of confidentiality and due process. Supervisory training sessions were begun at the administration building followed by the building principals. The EAP coordinator/counselor conducted these sessions. In addition, she hired a secretary. At this point the psychologist's role was one of advising, consulting, and serving as a sounding board for the coordinator. We also helped in designing a process by which our community referral network could be set in place and a method of statistical accountability could be started. Currently, the psychologists continue to serve on the Steering Committee in an advising and consulting role. Meetings are held monthly.

In summary, through involvement in a district wide strategic planning process, a school psychologist was able to step out of the traditional assessment, direct service with students, and gatekeeping for special

education role into a much more diverse, organizational climate/structure consulting role. This required breaking out of the case consultation mindset into a broader organizational perspective (Harrington, 1985).

Working on a committee with parents, teachers, principals, directors, and an assistant superintendent increased the visibility of the school psychologist. This organizational level of involvement allowed the psychologist to impact the lives of many individuals. Many roles were added including advocacy for employee benefits and well being, process facilitator of communication and planning, "expert" role in terms of knowledge of community referral resources/agencies and organizational change/consultant role in developing a system-wide program.

Essential Ingredients of an EAP

The EAP industry has grown rapidly in the last 15 yeaars, moving from primarily alcohol/drug abuse prevention/intervention programs to focusing on well being and health. It is estimated that 15% to 20% of a company's employees will experience a personal problem that will interfere with work behavior and productivity. EAP's vary in scope and design ranging from a social agency, fringe benefit model to a problem control, identification and termination model. Each organization must organize, plan, and structure their EAP to meet their organization's structure, climate, mission, and goals. When an EAP is being designed, certain ingredients are essential (Masi, 1984).

1. Program support
2. A program plan
3. A policy statement
4. An information, assessment and referral service
5. Appropriate staffing
6. A confidential record-keeping system
7. A community referral network
8. Appropriate location of the EAP
9. Funding
10. Resolution of legal questions
11. Training of personne
12. Program evaluation
13. Employee education and outreach

Mental Health Counseling in the Work Place

School psychologists provide assessment and counseling for students. Very often we are asked to provide various levels of intervention for employees. Time constraints on the psychologists in our district necessitated a shift of the primary responsibility for this service to the EAP. Penzer (1987) has argued that EAPs have had a dramatic effect on the provision of mental health services and that the mental health community has moved from a 2-party system (client and provider) to a three party system (client, provider, insurance carrier) to a four party system (client, provider, insurance carrier, and EAP or HMO. EAPs attempt to find consumers within their organization, the best and most appropriate services at reasonable prices. In our experience as school psychologists, several types of mental and emotional problems are common among exployees.

1. Individual adjustment problems
2. Divorce and marital problems
3. Family stressors such as absent spouse, child behavioral problems
4. Depression and suicide among family members
5. Legal and financial problems
6. Emotional stress related to physical illness
7. Supervisory/subordinate relationship problems

For the most part mental health counseling in the workplace is short-term and specific with job performance a key variable. Referrals out for long term counseling are necessary. Crisis counseling to deal with emergency episodes such as a death or suicide attempt is needed. The EAP counselor must serve as an advocate or broker for the employee between the organization and the community service provider. The EAP counselor must also provide educational and health promotion/fitness programs. Clearly, mental health counseling in the workplace can help employees maintain a productive role by addressing such problem areas as stress, anxiety, depression, social support coping.

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